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ABSTRACT

The spontaneous speech of three Mexican American children (one boy and two girls) and their mothers, siblings, relatives, and neighbors was recorded to investigate the relationships between language and cultural values and beliefs, and between language, input, and cognition and the acquisition of linguistic forms. The children were first-born, 20, 24, and 26 months old at the start of the study, and just beginning to produce two-word utterances. They had a younger sibling born when they were 23 to 32 months old; their mothers were the primary caregivers. Two recordings, 1-5 days apart, were made every three weeks, each for two hours, totaling 134 hours. The boy was taped for 9 months and the girls for 12 months during meal and bath times, play with peers and parents, visits with friends and relatives, outings to the park or store, and television-watching. Findings indicated that input language was a powerful socializing force through which adults directed the children's behavior and taught them what was important to know, do, talk about, and feel; and that there was a clear relationship between the contexts in which children were directed to speak, beliefs about appropriate behaviors for children, and other behaviors of the adults in interacting with the children. (NQA)

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The Acculturation and Development of Language in Mexican American Children

Dan I. Slobin, Principal Investigator

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Final Grant Report for NIE-G-81-0103

The Acculturation and Development of Language

in Mexican American Children

Dan I. Slobin, Principal Investigator

The major goal of this investigation was to describe the language socialization of three Mexicano children in an attempt to understand the relationship between the acquisition of language and cultural norms for language use. The basic theme throughout was that children learn language through culture and culture through language. What the people under study see as important for their children to learn determines how they structure their interactions with them. Input language is a powerful socializing force through which adults direct children's behavior and teach them what is important to know, to do, to talk about, and to feel. Thus, caregivers create contexts in which they can provide cultural information while teaching socially appropriate behavior.

Following in the tradition of a number of recent, ethnographic studies (Blount, 1977; Heath forthcoming; Miller, 1979; Ochs, 1980; Schieffelin 1979), the study treated the acquisition of culture and the acquisition of language as natural contexts for each other. The assumption was that within the social matrix, children acquire not only a system of grammar, but also a "system of use regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, etc. -- all the components of communicative events, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them" (Hymes, 1974-75). Within interactional sequences children develop a general theory of the ways speaking appropriate in their community.

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In interactions with children, caregivers act in particular ways based on their assumptions concerning the capacities of young children, the nature of the caregiver role, and the behaviors expected of caregivers. Caregivers provide not only the situations in which acquisition can take place, but also the definitions and meanings inherent in the situations themselves (H. Geertz 1959). What adults accept as meaningful and therefore, what children come to see as meaningful depends on culturally-based expectations. In essence, caregivers provide children not only with linguistic input, but with cultural input as well. Implicit in the interaction is a set of procedures for interpreting situations--rules for appropriate behavior.

Because competence is acquired in and defined by the context, this study of the development of communicative competence was grounded in ethnography. The goal was to go beyond simply a description of talk settings and cultural differences in language input to document the relationship between input style and other aspects of culture. The aim was to discover the patterning and functions of speaking (Bauman & Sherzer 1975) by providing a kind of "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the social context. A number of different types of data were collected (tape recordings of spontaneous speech, observations about child-care behavior, interviews about socialization practices) and all were used to answer and raise questions about the others. For example, the participants' conceptions of their cultural beliefs and values were used to interpret the meaning and impact of particular linguistic behaviors and to guide the observer's interpretations of those

behaviors. The basic assumption was that an act or utterance could not be understood without taking into account its significance for the participants.

Major Components of the Study

The focus of the present study was the patterns of interaction that were similar across three families sharing a number of common features. All of the parents of the subject children were immigrants from Central Mexico (the states of Guanajuato, Michoacan, Jalisco, and Colima). None of the mothers had been living in the United States for more than four years before her first child (the subject child) was born. Spanish was the language in all the homes and all the parents were literate in that language, if not in English. None of the parents were college-educated (two of the fathers had completed high school) and all three fathers were laborers.

The families, who lived in ethnically-mixed communities in Oakland and Richmond, California, were located through a bilingual nursery school in the area that pre-enrolled children at the age of 2 years. The three children (one boy and two girls) were 20, 24, and 26 months at the start of the study and were just beginning to produce two-word utterances. All of the children were first-born and all had a younger sibling born when they were 23 to 32 months old. The mother was the primary caregiver in each home although other adults were often present during taping sessions.

There were some differences in the lifestyles of the three fami-

lies. The two girls lived in neighborhoods with high proportions of Spanish-speaking families and they also lived close to other members of their kin group. The little boy, however, lived in a neighborhood that was predominantly black and English-speaking. Thus, his contacts with relatives and neighbors were not the everyday occurrences that they were in the other two homes. The girls also had much more contact with peers. Each had one constant playmate 2 years older than herself while the little boy primarily played alone or with his mother.

Daily Activities

Taping began in each home with the second visit. The first was a short visit for the purpose of meeting the parents and describing the study. The early times for taping were chosen by the mother. During the course of taping, however, events occurring at other times were observed and recorded. Among the situations recorded were meal-times, bath-times, play with peers, play with parents, visits with friends and relatives, outings to the park or store, and T.V.-watching.

Data on the everyday organization of behavior were recorded throughout the study. It was important to know whom the children interacted with and what occurred within those interactions--who was responsible for various caregiving functions (bathing, feeding, settling disputes, consoling, etc.), who played with them, and who talked with them. Other less frequent contexts were also recorded as well and special occasions (e.g., births, birthday parties, baptisms, holidays) were also noted and observed when possible.

Language Data

The major portion of the study consisted of samples of spontaneous speech. Longitudinal speech-sampling procedures were followed similar to those used by Bloom (1970). The procedure involved tape-recording a relatively small number of children and making contextual notes concerning the events and behaviors accompanying the spoken utterances. While an observer (Ann Eisenberg) was always present during the taping sessions, recordings were made only at times when other children or adults were present since she did not want to elicit speech or influence the child in any way.

Each child was observed and recorded every three weeks. At those three-week intervals, two recordings were made (one to five days apart), each approximately two hours long. The little boy was taped for nine months and the two girls for twelve months. The boy was dropped from the study when it was established (through the nursery school he began attending) that he had some speech disorder.

All samples of recorded speech were transcribed as soon as possible after the recording session, within two to five days. Each transcript was reviewed once more against the tape. When portions of the transcript that were to be used for analyses were unclear, a native speaker of Spanish was consulted concerning their interpretation. A total of 134 hours of spontaneous speech between children and their mothers, siblings, relatives, and neighbors was recorded and transcribed. Recordings were made most often inside the home or outside in the yard or courtyard although parts of many took place inside a neighbor's home,

in a park, or at the store. Other children were nearly always present during the taping sessions in the girls' homes and their speech was included in both the samples and analyses.

The Analyses

The investigation was a first attempt at an ethnographic study of some aspects of the development of communicative competence. The two parts of the study included (1) a description of the relationship between language and cultural values and beliefs and (2) a discussion of the effects of language, input, and cognition on the acquisition of temporal reference.

A large portion of the study focused on the nature of conversational exchanges between the children and those adults (and children) with whom they interacted frequently. The exchanges identified for analysis were chosen because of the frequency with which they occurred and their relationship to features identified in previous studies on children's interactions with their caregivers (e.g. Bates, Camaioni, & Volterra 1975; Keenan & Schieffelin 1976; Scollon 1976; Snow 1977). One type of intentional sequence that was particularly frequent was structured through the use of adult questions. The adults in the study asked a number of routine questions that reflected important categories of social knowledge. Question routines focused on four major topics: (1) labels for objects and names of individuals (e.g., "What's your name?"); (2) the identity of the donor of an object (e.g., "Who gave it to you?"); (3) the location or activity of relatives (e.g., "Where's your Daddy?"); and (4) the birth of a new sibling (e.g., "What do you want?

A boy or a girl?").

Asking questions was closely related to actual teaching of words and concepts. Many of the topics that questions focused on were things that adults felt children should know. While object labels and numbers and letters were asked about, names were the most important focus of instruction. Personal names were important in marking one's own identity as well as the identities of others. It was not sufficient for the children to know just their first name. Their two last names were part of their identity as well--especially since last names belong to both their parents.

Question routines involving names, the location of relatives, and the givers of objects also marked relationships. Each time an adult asked "Who is it?" while looking at a photograph or "Where's your Daddy?", they were saying, "This is à person that's important to you." Routines involving the identities of relatives and their locations are certainly not a feature or interaction peculiar to these Mexicano homes. They have also been mentioned as an aspect of conversation in middle-class Anglo homes (Eisenberg, 1981; Sach 1981; Sachs 1977). What seemed different, however, was: (1)their extremely high frequency; (2) the number of different individuals included in such conversation (extending to lists of the the children's friends and as far out in the kin group as second and third cousins); and (3) the fact that such questions were commonly asked <u>outside</u> the child's home by many different people. In fact, by asking the routine questions within the home also prepared the children to respond to the same questions asked by outsiders.

In other interactional sequences, the adults in the study told children what to say in conversation. The adult would produce an utterance and command the child to repeat it by using the phrase dile "say to him/her" (from di, "say" + le, "to him/her"). Directions to speak were also used in dyadic interaction (i.e., the child was told to repeat something back to the adult), but they were most common in triadic interaction. That is, one adult told a child what to say to a third individual. Through the use of dile the adults helped the children get what they wanted, encouraged them to participate verbally in an interaction, forced them to respond to speech directed to them, and ensured that they spoke politely. Sequences in which a child was told to speak to another person often extended across a number of conversational turns. By supplying the child's contributions, the adult could create a conversation between the child and others who were important in his/her social world.

What the child was directed to say depended in large part on the identity of the individual to be addressed. The adults were not simply telling the children what to say, but they were telling them what would be appropriate to say based on the identity of the intended addressee. Speech to be addressed to infants (and baby dolls) was syntactically simple and high-pitched, consisting of vocatives, attentionals, and noises (e.g., "acucu"). Speech to peers emphasized politeness and the initiation of interaction, as well as more assertive types of interaction, including teasing and the formulation of requests. Speech directed to adult addressees emphasized politeness and the importance of

responding verbally when addressed oneself. Further distinctions were made between adults who were members of the household and could be asked to perform a variety of acts and visitors who one offered things to or performed for verbally by telling them one's name and age, the names of other family members, and stories about one's personal experiences.

While the parents never said that they used dile, "say to him/her," to teach their children to talk, they clearly felt that they used it to teach them to behave. The use of dile often corresponded to their notions of how young children should behave in interaction. There was a clear relationship between the contexts in which young children were directed to speak, beliefs about appropriate behaviors for young children, and other behaviors of the adults in interacting with the children.

Two concepts were being specifically taught in many of the interactions involving dile. First, children were being taught the importance of responding to an initiation by another speaker. Second, they were being taught the appropriate politeness formulas and routines to accomplish a variety of social acts. The unifying concept across many of these situations was politeness. The adults believed that it was their responsibility to teach their children not to be groseros, "rude," or malcriados, "poorly raised." One dimension of politeness involved paying attention to others (i.e., responding) while another involved the ability to saludar, "greet," appropriately, acknowledge gifts, and act as host or hostess. Comments by the adults in the study on the importance of not being malcriado supported a number of prior studies involving the

importance of training for respeto, "respect," in the socialization of Mexican-American children (Coles 1977; Fromm & Maccoby 1972).

Talk was an important component of interaction in the homes and parents were pleased when young children were able to participate. They considered it rude to ignore speech and were quick to draw the children's attention to speech directed to them. Among the most frequently repeated statements in the homes was Te habla, "s/he's speaking to you." If the child did not know the appropriate response or did not seem interested in responding, the adults did not let the matter drop. Instead, they directed the child to repeat the appropriate response. Thus, even if the child did not actually repeat the response, the other speaker's verbal message had been acknowledged and s/he received the information s/he was looking for. It was not enough simply to respond for the child because: (1) children had to learn to respond for themselves; and (2) it was considered important for them to develop relationships (based on social interaction) with other people.

Politeness routines were also an important aspect of linguistic socialization. The children's use of a wide variety of politeness routines seemed especially early when compared with previous reports on their use by young children (Bates 1976; Gleason and Weintraub 1976a & b). A number of factors seemed to contribute to the early and spontaneous use of such formulas. First, the adults in the study placed a great deal of emphasis on their use and rarely, if ever, let an opportunity go by without modeling their use. In addition, the children may have had more opportunities for instruction to occur because of the patterns of

interaction within their homes. They had frequent, almost daily, contacts with many individuals-- neighbors and kin--and the comings and goings of those individuals were highly marked. Finally, because the children were frequently told to repeat utterances in other circumstances as well, being told to say "say thank you" was made less of a "special" occasion. Since repeating speech was a natural activity, the children may have been more likely to repeat politeness formulas and, therefore, more likely to learn them.

Both questions and prompts (dile) and most frequently a combination of the two were used by the adults in the study to create conversations involving three or more participants. That is, they were used to draw the children into complex interactions. One common form of interaction often involving more than two participants was teasing. Teasing was simultaneously a form of verbal play and a means of socializing children to behave in certain ways.

The adults generally began teasing with an initiation that fell into one of four categories: (1) threats; (2) insults; (3) saying something they knew the child would object to; and (4) mocking the child's speech. Teasers threatened to inflict bodily harm, withhold rights to a valued activity, disrupt important relationships, and withhold affection (i.e.I'm going to take your baby away," "I'm going to mash your nose"). Insults attacked a valued ability (e.g., singing, dancing) or attribute such as attractiveness or sanity (e.g., "You're ugly!"). Saying something the adult knew the child would object to involved their special knowledge about the child's likes, dislikes, and opinions (e.g.,

'Gabriela wants a baby girl!"). Mocking the child's speech involved responding to the child using the same morphological errors and phonological deformations used by the child. The latter form of teasing was less frequent, with threats and insults accounting for most of the initiations.

While teasing could and did occur on occasion in dyadic situations, it was much more common when three or more people were present. There seemed to be three primary purposes to teasing sequences: (1) to amuse the adult(s); (2) to have fun with the child; and (3) to issue an indirect message to some individual. Provoking a response from a child was considered funny, particularly if another adult was present to share in the amusement of a child's response to an attack. Most of the time, however, the object was also to have fun with the child. When both participants were amused, the interaction was most satisfactory. In a sense, teasing and joking were a means of interacting with children when there was little to be said. While researchers have begun to focus on children's spontaneous verbal play with peers (Garvey 1977; Watson-Gegeo & Boggs 1977), they have tended to neglect the non-ritualized forms of verbal play that occur in interactions between adults and children. Yet as competence with the language increases, children should become more able to use language for enjoyment in interactions with adults as well. In fact, adults themselves may be communicating the information that interaction can be playful.

Teasing sequences involved a number of other multi-party situations as well. When more than two individuals are involved in a conversation,

the possibility arises for one utterance to be directed toward two or more addressees. The message intended for each of these addressees may differ. One intended illocutionary effect is direct while the other is indirect and lateral (Clark & Carlson 1982). In talking laterally, the speaker does not appear to be talking to the indirect addressee, but to someone else--an appearance which is often useful.

In the case of teasing, an utterance was often addressed to a third party, but the butt of the tease was a child who was expected to overhear. Challenges were frequently issued in the third person to draw someone else in to agree about the shortcomings of the individual being teased (e.g., "Laura's crazy, isn't she, Gaby?"). The children were given the opportunity both to be the indirect victim of teasing and to gang up on another child.

Indirect, lateral speech acts were also used in other interactional sequences that did not involve teasing. Speaking for an audience was used to shame children or to make them proud by making their behavior public knowledge. Praising, shaming, and teasing were often closely related within an interactive sequence. For example, announcing that Gaby had already finished doing a puzzle while Laura was still working on hers simultaneously complimented Gaby's performance, teased Laura about hers, and challenged Laura to perform better. When adults told Child A how badly Child B was behaving, they were also letting B know that that behavior was unacceptable and using B's misbehavior to teach A what not to do.

The Acquisition of Temporal Reference

In the second set of analyses, cultural variables became a side issue, and the general area of the acquisition of temporal reference was addressed in an attempt to sort out some of the separate influences of the language being learned, input (and its relationship to cultural values), and cognitive abilities on language learning. Two levels of analysis were used. The first focused on the use of morphological endings to mark the temporal parameters of events. The second focused on the ability to talk about events outside the ongoing context--that is, without the support of the here-and-now.

In the analysis of the use of verb inflections, the major question was how the children first interpreted the meaning of those inflections. That is, did they initially use them to mark aspectual notions (i.e., the internal temporal contour of an event) or did they use them to mark tense (i.e., time-line notions) as well? Since many studies (e.g., Antinucci & Miller 1976; Bloom, Lifter & Hafitz 1980; Bronckart & Sinclair 1976) have suggested that children first use verb endings to encode aspect before they use them to mark tense, it was of interest to know how features of the Spanish language would affect acquisition.

The analyses focused on three grammatical tenses: the preterit (perfective past), the present progressive, and the indicative (simple present). The first question asked was whether those verb forms were used only for the appropriate time-line distinction (i.e., preterit for past events and present progressive and indicative for present events). The second question asked was whether those forms were used with only a

subset of verbs, in particular whether the preterit was only used with verbs that described punctual, resultative events and the progressive only with verbs that described durative, nonresultative events.

The data showed that in learning Spanish the children were not just using verb inflections redundantly to mark the temporal characteristics inherent in the meaning of the verb itself. There were no clear co-occurences between any particular inflection and any semantic sub-category of verbs. Nor did the children mark aspect independently of the relationship of the event time to speech time. Rather than misanalyzing the meaning of inflections (i.e., marking aspect instead of tense), the children did not seem to be initially making any analyses at all. Roughly, three stages seemed to occur in their use of verbs and verb inflections.

In the first stage, they generally used only one form or occasionally two forms of any one verb, with the selection of that form highly dependent on input frequencies and the desires and intentions of the child. During this period, the children made few errors because the forms tended to be closely tied to the contexts in which they were appropriate. In the second stage, they seemed to be beginning to make distinctions between verb forms that were based not on the inflections per se, but on the differences between the use of each form for specific verbs. They began to contrast some past, progressive, and indicative forms of verbs, but only with some verbs, and the different forms were still dependent on various routine contexts. That is, while they clearly used different forms of the a verb, any rules they made seemed

specific to each verb. In the third stage, they began using all three tense forms of many different verbs to express a number of temporal contrasts.

There were also important differences between the use of the inflectional system in Spanish and what has been reported on its acquisition in English (e.g., Bloom et al. 1980; Brown 1973). The data on children learning Spanish showed that when the progressive is an optional form, it is not acquired at the same time as past marking. One possibility is that if a form is optional in a language, children may not bother to make that distinction until relatively late. They may not perceive the difference between the two forms and if two forms do the same thing, they may simply choose the simpler of the two (e.g., a noncompound tense in favor of a compound one). They may even be delayed in their understanding of what the second form does and in looking for distinctions, may use a new form in only limited contexts--for example, using the progressive in a "storybook" mode.

Differences between Spanish and English also seemed to have an effect on the number and types of errors made in learning the verb system. The use of nonpast forms to describe past events seemed much rarer than it does in English. One likely explanation is the absence of a neutral, citation form of the verb. The absence of an unmarked alternative forces the speaker to choose a marked form and, as a result, may make the learner more sensitive to distinctions between forms. Support for the hypothesis that children make fewer errors in using tense/aspect forms when the language forces the speaker to choose a form that is

marked for tense and aspect is found in studies of children learning Hebrew (Berman, forthcoming) and Polish (Smoczynska forthcoming).

The second set of analyses focused on children's ability to talk about their past experiences. While most studies concerning such conversations (e.g., Eisenberg 1981a; Sachs 1977; Stoel-Gammon and Cabral 1977) address the early period of talk about past events when adult input plays an extremely important role in guiding what children say, the present study also focused on the next stages of development when children begin providing such information spontaneously.

Three phases of development were identified. In the first, the children were highly dependent on adult participation. Their contributions were largely restricted to one-word responses and repetitions of adult utterances. In the second, the children were less dependent on the adult's scaffold. Their utterances were longer and contributed more information; however, the children only talked freely about the elements of an event that were common to a category of events (e.g., birthday parties, the circus), rather than about specific occurrences of an event. Conversation was dependent of a "script" entailing the elements comprising the event, rather than on actual memory for the event.

In the third phase of development, the children talked about specific events, but their descriptions were only cohesive when they mentioned the past as an explanation for some present state or behavior. Although they had begun to using linguistic connectives, they did not use them to mark any real logical or sequential relationships between elements. There was no evidence that the children had a "plan" in

telling their story that continued across more than two utterances. There was also no clear relationship between linguistic form and narrative complexity: specific events were occasionally described with primitive utterances while complex sentences often lacked organization.

An analysis of the descriptions of past events elicited by adults indicated that the structure provided in such dialogic formats was not more organized or more specific than that in the children's own narratives. Adults almost never provided a sequential framework (e.g., asking "And then?"), but seemed satisfied with a listing of all the elements subsumed by a particular topic or "script." While adults may influence the topics discussed and the course of a particular conversation, the data suggested that their influence on information structures is synchronic, but not necessarily diachronic.

General Discussion

The basic theme throughout the study was that children learn culture through language and language through culture. What the people under study saw as important for their children to learn determined how they structured their interactions with them. Input language was a powerful socializing force through which the adults directed the children's behavior and taught them what was important to know, do, talk about and feel. The caregivers created contexts in which they could provide cultural information while teaching socially appropriate behavior.

The adult's views of children and their beliefs about appropriate

behaviors for both children and members of the social group in general affected how the adults interacted with young children. Important concepts were taught in many contexts and through the use of many linguistic forms. Because interactional routines were an important component of interaction between members of the society, the Mexicano caregivers in the study taught their children to greet, to thank,and to acknowledge gifts, giving them the appropriate lines to say in interactions with dile, "say to him/her." They also asked the children questions concerning their name, age, and members of their family in order to teach those concepts, test their knowledge of them, and ensure that they would answer appropriately when others asked those same questions. The adults stressed the nature of the children's identity with respect to others and with dile encouraged children to interact with others, thereby developing and reinforcing those social relationships.

At the same time, the children were learning language through culture. Because cultural values shaped the interactions they were engaged in, those values in turn shaped much of what they learned about language. The emphasis on politeness routines, for example, meant that they learned such forms relatively early in the language learning process. Similarly, their facility with names, the focus on people and the origins of objects in their conversations (i.e., who gave something), the topics of their discussions about past experiences, their ability to respond to questions, and some of the early tense forms they used all seemed related to aspects of input and adult interactive style with young children.

One of the major findings of the study concerns the importance of language in the acquisition of sociocultural knowledge. While people have long assumed the existence of such a relationship, language has commonly been ignored as an important factor in socialization studies. Yet language is an important part of the socialization process at a number of different levels. At one level, adults directly tell children what to say and how to act. They tell them about the objects, individuals, and events that are culturally relevant. And in speaking about some events and not others, they indirectly communicate which events are more important than others.

At another level, interaction involving language is the enculturation process. Social relationships are interactional achievements which are brought into being, displayed, and enacted through the concrete communicative behaviors of participants. Conversation entails the constant negotiation of relationships which are continually being defined. In learning how to speak and act, children learn the conventions for conducting their own social relationships. One of the major goals of the caregivers in the study was to teach their children the conventional ways of relating to others. Through encouraging their children to speak and respond and by providing them with the appropriate lines in conversation (with dile), the adults were able to provide the children with precise information on how to behave in conversation.

Because so much of what people do and say in conversation interactions reflects important cultural or societal beliefs, values and expectations, an analysis of interaction patterns can also reveal the

assumptions of the participants. It can illustrate what members of a social group believe is important, as well as how they view the individuals with whom they interact. When considered in conjunction with what individuals state about those assumptions, we can investigate some of the relationships between form and function in language. Questions, for example, can be used to obtain information unknown to the asker or, as in the routine interactions in these homes, to test the child's knowledge about important information, to play, and to involve the child in interaction. Questions can also be used as imperative (Cook-Gumperz 1979) or as rhetorical questions (Schieffelin 1979). The specific functions of questions and their use in socializing young children will depend on the network of those who ask questions of children. The present study suggests (as does Heath 1979) that preschool children who have frequent contacts with many individuals of different ages, sexes, and degree of familiarity will have very different experiences with questions than children accustomed to a small network of family and close associates. In particular, the assumptions made by questioners concerning the role of questions in socialization will be very different.

The close relationship between language and cultural beliefs also means that the analysis of interaction may be an important source of information about the assumptions of members of a particular culture. If we consider the individual's statements about their own behaviors, we can study interaction for the purpose of understanding why members of a particular social group behave the way they do. Looking across different situations, we can see how our knowledge concerning one type of

behavior helps make sense of other behaviors. Observing the actual patterns of interaction can also help us make sense of parents' reports of childrearing behaviors (e.g., Durrett, O'Bryant, and Pennebaker 1975). It is not enough to know what parents say they do with their children. Looking at interaction can tell us how they do it.

Several aspects of early language use between these Mexicano parents and their children seemed to differ from what has been described in the child language literature that focuses primarily on white, middle-class children (e.g., Snow and Ferguson, eds. 1977). One such feature was the emphasis in the present study on the interactional uses of language rather than on more referential features. While naming did exist in the conversations in the study, naming was rarely a feature of dyadic exchange, but more commonly a means of initiating conversation between the child and some other individual. The emphasis on triadic, rather than dyadic, interaction calls into question existing theories concerning the nature of input language. One possible response to this problem is to examine the data on which such theories were originally based. While triadic interaction may be more prevalent in some groups than in others, it is also possible that earlier studies have overlooked an important context of language learning.

One important result of the manner in which the data were obtained may be an expanded notion of the capabilities of young children in negotiating a variety of social interactions. The variety of situations in which the data were collected illustrated the effect of a wide variety of individuals on interaction within the home. Along with similar stu-

dies by Heath (forthcoming), Miller (1979), Ochs (1980), and Schieffelin (1979), the study documented a greater variety of social and linguistic acts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic and social repertoire of the young child. It illustrated what children did and said when they were playing, teasing, hungry, angry, tired, talkative, and nonresponsive. In doing so, the study demonstrated how the situation and the nature of the participants can affect the words chosen.

The study also provided an important contribution to research on language input. It addressed the question of why caregivers talk the way they do to young children (i.e., why speech to children differs from speech to adults). It confirmed the fact that input language is not just a language for teaching linguistic forms; it is a powerful socializing force (Gleason & Weintraub 1976b). While feedback may be a factor helping to shape parental input, much of what adults do with young children stems from their beliefs concerning both the abilities of children and what it is appropriate for children to do. Yet what children can do in conversation plays a role in directing aspects of adult input as well. For example, the adults only began to ask a lot of questions about nonpresent events when the children themselves began talking about such topics. Similarly, the adults most likely did not attempt to impose a temporal or logical structure on their children's narratives because had they attempted to do so, the conversation would have rapidly disintegrated. For the sake of communication, adults do not attempt to go beyond their children's conversational abilities.

The interactions with dile were especially interesting with respect to the question of the effect of input on linguistic development. With respect to the acquisition of syntax, the instructions with dile that seemed best designed to teach language structure were the directions to repeat a phrase correcting a grammatical error. It has been widely accepted, however, that such corrections have little effect on children's ability to produce correct phrases spontaneously (Brown 1973). In addition, imitation seems to have very little effect on the acquisition of syntax (Bloom, Hood & Lightbown 1974). Modeling is important in generating language structure only if the child can make some systematic abstraction from it. In fact, the situations in which children were asked to correct their own utterances were the ones in which they were least likely to repeat: they never did so. Many of the other utterances the children were asked to repeat were so far above their linguistic competence that they could not have possibly abstracted much from their repetition.

In addition, in many situations the children performed less well syntactically when asked to repeat, than they did when producing speech spontaneously. In particular, when directed to make a request with a indirect dile directive (e.g., Dile que te de una manzana, "Tell her to give you an apple," instead of Dile, "dama una manzana", "Tell her, 'give me an apple'"), the children often used incorrect verb forms and pronouns, although they were capable of constructing such requests correctly on their own. In essence, the dile directives hindered their production of well-formed utterances.

Requests to repeat seemed to have a greater effect on the learning of various lexical items. The children in the study rapidly learned the lexical items that the adults directed them to repeat. At a stage when few of their utterances were longer than two or three words, the children could state their own full names (three to four names long), the full names of their parents and siblings, and could give first names of many other relatives, godparents, friends, etc.

At the same time, the children had learned many of the politeness formulas used for greeting, acknowledging gifts, making offers, etc. With politeness formulas, however, having the child repeat is not enough to ensure that they would be used correctly. Politeness formulas have no referents; instead they are appropriate to a specific situation. Although the caregiver could tell the child to utter one of the expressions, the dile directive did not make explicit which aspect of the situation required the use of the formula. The children made a number of errors in attempting to use the formulas spontaneously that indicated that implicit instructions as to when to use them were not quite enough to make them easily learnable.

There was also some indication that the children may have been learning that the imitation of another's speech was a viable way to participate in interactions involving many participants. While the sample size is too small to allow us to make any definitive statements, all the children imitated extensively, especially when they were attempting to participate in a conversation between two other individuals. That is, although not requested to do so, they frequently "echoed" their

caregivers' utterances (or portions of those utterances) in an attempt to participate in complex conversations. Folger and Chapman (1978) have claimed that children are more likely to imitate when adults frequently repeat the child's utterances. The data described here suggest that children may also be likely to imitate spontaneously if frequently asked to do so.

The study also explored aspects of the relationship between input and the acquisition of linguistic forms. Many of the analyses illustrated the relationship between what adults talked about with children and what the children said. For example, the children seemed to learn a wide array of politeness formulas as a result of frequent instructions to use them and frequent opportunities to hear them. Similarly, the fact that the adults asked more who- questions than what- questions explained the fact that the children in the study learned to answer who- questions relatively early when compared to children learning other languages (e.g., Ervin-Tripp, 1970; Tyack and Ingram 1977). Input frequency also had an effect on the early use of syntactic forms. The fact that caregivers frequently used past forms such as bought and gave--past forms that did not describe punctual, resultative events--meant that the children did not just use such forms to describe such events, as previous studies would have predicted. The frequent use of past forms to describe non-punctual events provided the children with a corpus of past forms that could not have been analyzed as "preterit ending means a punctual (or completive) event." The input also affected the topics of conversation. Children, like their caregivers, talked about the origins of objects (their donors), absent family members, and

certain experiences, and they had even begun to try and tease other people.

At the same time, the study indicated some aspects of language learning that seem less affected by input and conversation with adults. While children analyzed the meaning of verb inflections (i.e., tense and aspect markers) depending upon the context in which those forms were used, the language itself also had an effect on the course of language acquisition and early strategies for language use. In Spanish as opposed to English, for example, the children began using the progressive form relatively late. With other (correct) linguistic options available, the children did not explicitly mark verbs for duration. The data also indicated that when a verb system has a number of different forms, children may have less difficulty in learning to use those forms appropriately.

There were also a number of cognitive limitations that seemed to affect the children's speech. For example, the past imperfect tense form tense was learned relatively late. One plausible explanation for this finding is that backgrounding, its major function in speech, is a difficult concept for young children (Cromer, 1968). Similarly, at a point in development when children talked extensively about past events and know any of the linguistic forms to indicate temporal and relational marking (e.g., tenses and sentence connectives), they were still unable to tell logical and coherent stories about their experiences. The children were not yet capable of making the logical inferences necessary to reestablish the sequence of an event.

At the same time, however, the context of talking about past events seemed to be one of the means by which the children learned about the elements of events that comprised their event structures. One means of developing event structures is through experience with the event itself. Yet experience with the event could also be indirect; that is, the event could be experienced (or re-experienced) through a retelling of the event. During the period of the formation of event structures (which Nelson & Brown, 1978, & Sheingold & Tenney, 1982, suggested occurs between 2 1/2 & 4 years), adults guide children through experiences both while they occur and after they have already taken place. Indirectly, then, we return once again to the effect of conversational interaction on language development: talking about past evens teaches children to talk about them, gives them the content for what to say, highlights the significant aspect of events, and may even validate their own memories of those experiences.

Finally, the study showed that competence must be assessed in cultural terms. An important finding is the need to consider not only whether utterances are syntactically correct, but whether they meet pragmatic constraints as well. Furthermore, we need to assess a wide variety of conversational abilities. By the end of taping, for example, one of the girls could speak quite fluently, employing a number of different tense markers, connectives, etc. That is, syntactically her speech was quite similar to that of the adults she interacted with. Yet she had not yet learned a number of conversational skills that they were adept at. Her stories were still illogical and lacked an internal tem-

poral structure. In addition, she was just learning to tease and still had difficulty recognizing when others were teasing her. She had also not yet learned to manipulate situations where multiple participants ere present in order to issue lateral, indirect speech acts. She had learned to talk to others, but she had not yet learned to talk through them.

Language use is embedded in a complex cultural system with culturally specific functions and meanings. In order to understand the meanings behind cultural variation in conversation and its effect on development, we must give careful attention to the ways of speaking across societies and to the acquisition of both linguistic and cultural knowledge. Since cultural and social values are continually expressed through social interaction, the examination of those interactions can furnish information about the relationship between language and culture and what the child is being taught about them.

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